

**North Dakota School for the Deaf
Future Services Plan (FSP) Transition Team
Meeting #5 - Thursday, March 25, 2010**

Draft Meeting Summary

Meeting Goals

- To review and affirm the foundational structure and process for the NDSD Future Services Plan (FSP) Initiative;
- To review, discuss, revise and approve the draft Transition Team Meeting Summary from February 18, 2010;
- To review and discuss the results of the FSP Progressive Survey;
- To review and discuss public input and comments;
- To receive informational presentations regarding current components of the educational and service delivery systems for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing in North Dakota;
- To discuss and define the initial components of North Dakota's Future Services Plan for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing; and
- To identify the "next steps" in the process including any additional data, materials, information and presentations.

Meeting Participants: Larry Robinson, Cynthia Tastad, Carol Lybeck, Holly Pederson, Michelle Rolewitz, Diane Rice, James Johnson, Terry Solheim, Dave Oehlke, Connie Hovendick, Cindy Wetzel, Nancy McKenzie and Fred Bott.

Staff: Carmen Grove-Suminski, Nancy Skorheim and Gary Gronberg.

Interpreters: Renae Bitner and Kathy Obregon

Guests/Observers: Tami Iszler and Nicole Swartwout

Facilitated by: The Consensus Council, Inc.

Welcome and Introductions: Participants were welcomed to the meeting and provided self-introductions.

Foundational Structure and Process Review: Participants reviewed and affirmed the consensus-based decision-making process, ground rules and Transition Team values. Participants reviewed the packet of materials prepared for the meeting today as well as the Meeting Summary from 2/18/10 (Handout #2) that was approved with the corrections noted.

There was clarification provided regarding the previous discussion about the model of service for NDSD into the future (Center of Excellence, Model/Magnet School, etc.) that would better meet the statewide needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing. There was discussion about the scope of the work of the Transition Team as noted in the legislative bill and whether there should be recommendations that go beyond what NDSD will/can provide. It was agreed

that it will be important for the Transition Team to identify all gaps, in the broadest sense, and then to identify which of those needs can be best met by NDSD. It was also agreed that there needs to be clarification of the current role/scope of the NDSD relative to service provision and what age groups must be served (K-12) and what other groups could be served (young adults, elderly). In fact, NDSD is available to serve all populations. Comparisons of NDSD outreach to the outreach services provided by ND Vision Services are not completely accurate/fair due to the differences in education practices between the distinct populations as well as the unique needs of each group.

The Transition Team was encouraged to factor in the ability and cost of a small school district providing a full array of services to a single or a few students. This is a difficult discussion that has implications for families and students in community-based settings relative to choices/options available to them (something that makes logical sense but not necessarily emotional sense). Complicating this is the need for qualified deaf education staff in rural areas and smaller communities as well as the diversity of views/philosophies among Special Education Directors across the state. National trends give examples of continuum of care models that begin with early childhood experiences. It was noted that deaf students may experience high levels of isolation in community settings, as opposed to living and learning with a larger group of peers.

Similar issues are faced by the Department of Human Services regarding provision of outreach services, including a lack of qualified staff to provide specialized services. An example provided was that of limited locations for adolescent addiction services, rather than a facility/program in each region of the state.

There may be a need for clarification about the authority (who has it/who needs it) to be sure that all school districts follow or adopt any recommendations made by the Transition Team. There may also be specific funding needs for school districts to implement recommendations. It was agreed that the focus should be on the provision of services based on student need through a comprehensive continuum and the authority issues can be addressed by leadership at DPI as well as through the legislative process. The Team must also take into account the existing laws, like IDEA that will govern/inform this process and the recommendations. It may be helpful, once the recommendations are developed, that an educational event be convened for other legislators and leaders to explain the recommendations, answer questions and provide an opportunity for early buy-in. It may also be appropriate to consider a press conference and/or summit of some sort to educate the general public. It will be critical to gain and have the support of legislative leaders, education leaders and interest groups like the North Dakota Education Association, School Administrators, ND Long Term Care Association and others.

There will likely be a need for formalized partnerships through memoranda of agreement to allow and encourage cross-cutting work and sharing of resources with the DPI, Department of Human Services, Higher Education and other groups and agencies. There may also be a need for policy changes regarding provision of services for low-incidence disabilities. This would have direct impact on state, local governments as well as Special Education Districts and may be seen as onerous or intrusive by those local entities.

There is an effort at starting a “Hands and Voices” parent-driven advocacy chapter in North Dakota. Such a group would provide tools for parents of deaf children to address educational and other issues as well as provide mutual support. Parents have various levels of acceptance of the issues and challenges involving the raising of a deaf child and thus, have a diversity of thoughts about involvement in parent organizations.

The Participants asked that the Planning Team pull together a compressed list of “givens” in regard to the prior discussions, much like has been done with the gaps in services list. This will serve as the nucleus of the plan and will be reviewed and expanded upon at the next meeting.

There was discussion about whether to break into small groups to identify/brainstorm gaps and potential solutions or whether that might be best done as a full group. It was agreed to remain as a single group for this purpose.

Informational Presentations/Updates Assigned from February 18, 2010:

- National data: Nancy Skorheim provided information from the American Institutes for Research, Center for Special Education Finance, Special Education Expenditure Project including the types of data collected and factors considered (teacher salaries, special services, etc.) when calculating expenditures. Nancy provided a handout noting the links and types of research available and also indicated that this could be used as a resource for data for the Transition Team if needed.
- NDSD Outreach Services data: Carol Lybeck provided information (including handouts) about NDSD costs related specifically to Outreach Services as well as a list of the services provided. There was discussion about how the costs were calculated based on the differences between a residential and community-based school, including costs like utilities, meals (3 per day) and other costs that are unique to NDSD. There was agreement that the residential program at NDSD is efficiently operating and functions below the national average. There is not agreement on how to/if to make comparisons to regular school education. The majority of “rental” income received at NDSD comes from the Head Start program. Carol also shared a list of outreach services provided by NDSD, which is consistent with recommendations by the Colorado study, with the exception of the provision of mental health services and full day childcare. There is a diversity of opinion about the availability of services in community-based schools relative to quality, inclusion, etc. There was an example provided of a student who wanted to go to the NDSD but “settled” for a mainstream school setting. It appeared that the experience was not positive for this student and that he may have been “passed through” the school system without appropriate attention paid to his unique needs. Eventually this student did transfer to NDSD and graduated with personal and academic satisfaction.
- There was discussion regarding the key agencies that are needed to collaborate and partner to assure success of any initiative. These agencies include NDSD, DPI/Special Education, Department of Human Services, and Higher Education. There is interest in obtaining data from the other partners relative to costs similar to what has been provided by NDSD however it was agreed that comprehensive data is not necessary at this time. Nancy McKenzie agreed to provide a summary of similar data about the Department of Human Services at the next Transition Team meeting.

- Questions were raised relative to advances in technology and how this plays a role in the work of the Transition Team. Early intervention, through technology and otherwise, has helped to assure a better start for young children. It was agreed that technology should be a consideration in all recommendations and potential initiatives.
- Research indicates that the most influential impact on people with deafness/hard of hearing is the quality of the education provided. This data also affirms that students are and can be successful in mainstream schools as well as residential settings and it was agreed that there continues to be a need for both types of services, provided they are high quality services. It was agreed that this premise is consistent with the Transition Team values.
- *Devils Lake, Fargo and representative rural Public Schools data:* Connie Hovendick shared information about services provided in the southeastern part of North Dakota. Based on an aggregate of the information provided, the estimates include an average cost of \$22,000 for the specialized teacher, the schools also provided therapy (OT,PT) services and contracted audiology services. Resource teachers provided a range of 20 minutes per student per day to full time for some students, based on a range of mild to severe impairment. There are 4, 6 and 8 students that are presently in the programs (both rural and urban) that responded to the request for information.
- It was agreed that this information is helpful but does not make comparisons any easier or more sensible. One of the Transition Team “givens” is that comparisons aren’t going to be helpful as a focal point for the Team.
- *Bismarck Public Schools data:* Cindy Wetzel provided an overview of the number of teachers (3 full time), students served (14) and services, including consultant services, provided by the Bismarck Public Schools. These costs also factor in the costs of special and regular education by grade levels (elementary, middle, high school).
- *NDSD Alumni Report:* James Johnson, President, NDSD Society, presented information and data (including a handout with 2008 legislative testimony and a Power Point presentation) about Return on Investment (ROI) for NDSD graduates. This information was previously provided to an interim legislative committee. The information tracks graduates over time, documenting their education (post-secondary) and career paths over decades, noting trends and changes in receipt in benefits (beginning of the Supplemental Security Income [SSI] program) and other factors. Over time there have become many more options for career paths for people who are deaf rather than the traditional “trades” and teaching careers of the past. There is not similar data collected about mainstream deaf students nor is there any methodology for tracking or contacting those students after graduation. The NDSD Society believes that NDSD graduates exceeded national standards/averages for successful employment, post-graduation over time. The Society also believes the success is due to the availability of the residential program at NDSD and what it contributed (emphasizing values and role models) to the preparation of graduates for employment in the mainstream world. Over 25 NDSD graduates have achieved post-graduate degrees. There has been a dramatic increase in NDSD students receiving SSI and it is thought that this may be related to DPI oversight for NDSD (both DPI oversight and SSI benefits were initiated in the 1970’s); this is not a scientific study but rather, a general sense of reasoning about the change.
- There was discussion about the types and severity of disabilities of NDSD students, the changing demographic of students at NDSD, and how that has changed the career and

higher education paths of students over time. This may also contribute to the increased numbers of NDSD students who need SSI to supplement any work or other income.

Plan Development: Participants agreed to proceed by beginning to draft the actual Transition Team Plan as opposed to a specific review of the draft gaps and needs document. The following plan components were identified:

- Identification of gaps and needs
- Values statements
- Requirements in HB 1013, use as a framework
- Potential for a Center of Excellence, with a specific definition of what that means
- A tag line like the 21st Century Deaf Education Plan (historic opportunity, rich tradition, building on success)
- Takes all prior studies, successes into consideration when making recommendations
- Wanting to grow our future with educational excellence, 5-star education
- Use the existing motto of NDSD

Participants discussed the “givens” or the areas of agreement reached that should be included in the report including:

- The Center of Excellence including service to all ages, coordinating force/leader, provide leadership and direction that fosters support and coordination (not solely responsible for all service provision); this would also assure some services being available 24/7/365 particularly for information and referral (combination of direct service and convener, partner referral service) as opposed to just the traditional 180-day school calendar
- Potential for dividing the Center of Excellence from the regular school to allow for flexibility for teachers and students
- Is it possible that there could be consensus about the need for a residential service in ND that does not necessarily have to be at the NDSD?
- When thinking about residential services as a concept, we need to keep in mind that there is more than just beds for sleeping involved. There is the possibility of housing other students from other states, as a regional school for the deaf (SD, MN, Canada). There is not agreement as to the traction for parents to send their students to another state for services; it may not be a realistic scenario. There may also be policies that preclude such an arrangement based on what services are available in what states.
- There is currently a provision to allow out-of-state students to attend NDSD as long as that student does not prevent a North Dakota student from entering (being at capacity).
- NDSD is a North Dakota asset, not just a Devil’s Lake asset.

Tasks in relation to HB 1013

- Gaps and needs
- Focus on outreach development and expansion in a comprehensive way

There was lengthy and productive discussion about the merits of retaining the residential program at NDSD. This is not an area of agreement among transition team members. The facilitator suggested the following statement for consideration by the Team:

There is a continued need for residential education services for deaf and hard of hearing students in North Dakota. The Transition Team chooses to place its emphasis on the development and expansion of outreach services over the next _____(timeframe)_____ with a recommendation to continuously to assess and evaluate service needs and options.

The Team discussed the statement and offered the following comments:

- Change the first sentence to say something like “on the continuum of services there is a need for residential services”
- There needs to be care taken not to place arbitrary value on the NDSB services or to devalue them (through wording); in the assessment phase, all services should be considered valuable
- There may need to be further study of the Constitutional language in regard to the NDSB
- There may be a need to further explore the development of outreach goals before agreeing on a general statement

After further discussion and refinement, Team members were not able to agree on a joint statement relative to residential services at this time.

Rather, Team members identified the following elements of importance for inclusion in the plan:

- Developing a focus on preschool services, ages 3-6, perhaps through regional centers
- Mainstreaming continues with supports through public schools
- Pick-up on transition aged youth
- Front loading services is the best approach to preparing students to enter their own local public school with supports
- Focus on regional, self-contained (satellite) preschool programs while recognizing that the numbers may be small (3 to 6 students).
- Better preparation for quality teachers through teacher prep programs, DPI traineeship, Plan on File Program and greater scholarship opportunities
- Develop other options than self-contained classrooms/preschools, perhaps through multi-county shared efforts (regional)
- Minot State University (MSU) offers some online coursework; they could also develop a mentoring program for new teachers
- Through the Masters Program at MSU, there is also an early childhood component, funded entirely by the federal government through a grant
- Teacher education/prep is the focus of MSU, not interpreter services

Identification of Next Steps: Team members agreed on the following next steps:

- Planning Team will review and refine the “gaps” document, including action steps for consideration by the full Team at the next meeting
- Nancy McKenzie will gather information specific to DHS services
- Ponder the question about what it would take (resources, human and financial) to develop the satellite/regional concept?

- Ponder the question about whether there are a group of preschoolers statewide and/or in a region that could benefit from socialization and communication activities with each other?
- There was a question as to what the implication of statewide Pre-K (thought to become a big issue in the 2011 legislative session) on NDSD and other services will be

Progressive Survey: Participants completed the progressive survey for tabulation and inclusion at the next meeting.

Summary Comments: Participants were asked to provide a summary comment regarding the progress made at the meeting today and these comments are as follows:

- It's been a long day and I'm excited about the outreach piece.
- Glad that Holly brought up getting into the nitty gritty.
- The better we do with outreach plan, the better support we will have for our future vision.
- I wish we would have started what we started a half hour ago five hours ago.
- Too much information, so little time. We have 3 days left and we need to finish our task in this short time.
- It seems that we have many different perspectives and we need to make more of a common path among us.
- We still have a lot of work to do.
- I feel better that I know what we are supposed to be doing, and we still have a lot to do.
- Ditto to others, I'm excited about making the outreach plan as attractive as possible.
- I like the ideas of outreach and feel I am becoming more open-minded about choices.
- My brain is full; we should have as much available and accessible that is community based as possible, with centralized services available when not possible.
- I'm encouraged by the way we are going; there is wisdom in all the diversity at the table; we can accomplish things together that we might not think possible. We need to keep the focus on the student.

Public Comment/Input: Jerry Balzer addressed the Transition Team, quoting Abraham Lincoln about a spot resolution in relation to meetings, that is, knowing the who, what, where and why of issues. Jerry is the retired Executive Director of Job Service ND who had desired a seat on the Transition Team. He noted his pleasure at the appointment of Michelle and James. Jerry has been acquainted and connected with NDSD since the 1940's and has a brother and son who are deaf. His son graduated from NDSD and has achieved a successful college and corporate career managing James Brady Grant programs. Jerry has long believed that American Sign Language (ASL) should be a required foreign language for high school students. Jerry noted that it is neither practical nor accurate to compare costs for NDSD and local schools. NDSD will have its 120th birthday this year and will have a celebration on campus in June and all Transition Team members are invited to attend. If the Transition Team has completed recommendations by the time of that gathering, Jerry suggests distribution of the report at that event to reach a large number of interested people. Jerry encourages the Transition Team to work hard to get it right.

Participants were thanked for their candor and efforts and the meeting was adjourned by consensus of the group with best wishes for safe travels.

Next Meetings: Participants were reminded of the next meeting(s) of the Transition and Planning Teams as follows:

Planning Team Meeting

Wednesday, March 31, 2010

3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Bismarck, ND: face-to-face and conference call.

Transition Team Meeting

Thursday, April 15, 2010

8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Devils Lake, pending availability of meeting and lodging space

Working Draft